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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000177

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SUBJECT: EU SPECIAL ENVOY KUBIS GIVES READOUT OF NIYAZOV MEETING

REF: A. ASHGABAT 151

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 144

Classified By: Ambassador Tracey Ann Jacobson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) EU Emissary to Central Asia Jan Kubis told the ambassador on 2/7 that he had raised energy issues with Niyazov at their meeting the previous day and tried to drive home the point that, despite the current lack of a coordinated EU energy policy, energy developments in Turkmenistan are of import to the EU. Kubis felt he had made plain to Niyazov that energy "is no more just the domain of national policies" in the evolving EU: the latter is preparing to engage as a unit in energy-issue dialogue with other parties. Issuance of the EU Green Book, probably in late March, should mark the next stage in this process. Tacitly conceding that his and the EU's dialogue with Niyazov had not/not previously featured the energy dimension, Kubis assessed it as serendipitous that he had broached the subject now, on a visit falling by chance amidst multiple other energy-linked VIP meetings in Ashgabat (Iranians on 2/3, GazProm on 2/19, TAP stakeholders 2/13, Ukrainians 2/14). At the same time, he was frank about having come with no mandate for anything more than "listening mode" - let alone to negotiate -- and about his unfamiliarity with even broad technical details of the subject.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Judging from Kubis's account, Niyazov's comments during their talk about Turkmenistan's energy scene were much akin to those he made to the Ambassador on January 23 (Ref A): in particular, an unenthusiastic review of the pros and cons of a Trans Caspian Pipeline, together with a rather more positive depiction of a potential Caspian-littoral pipeline, to be built jointly with Russia. He repeated to Kubis what he last week told the Ambassador: that Putin told him the Kremlin would never consent to direct gas sales to Ukraine. Kubis said Niyazov sounded adamant about not committing Turkmenistan's gas long-term or indefinitely to Gazprom, though he would consider signing an agreement for up to two, maybe three, years. At the same time, Kubis had a strong sense that Niyazov is acutely fearful of Moscow's potential to do him harm, including physically. Kubis's overall impression: Niyazov feels deeply isolated and is "frantically" trying to escape from the corner into which the Russians have squeezed him, but cannot himself actively promote the pipeline alternatives which would save him.

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador asked Kubis about the social-issue content of his meeting. Kubis responded that he had asked

Niyazov a "normal" question about the GOTX,s recent pension "recalculation" (Ref B), referring to general reports of social distress in its wake. Evincing surprise, Niyazov looked to his Ministers, who quickly assured him there had been absolutely no negative results. Both the Foreign and Finance Ministers were "physically shaking" as the topic was discussed, Kubis related in near-amazement. He surmised that no-one dares inform Niyazov of simple unpalatable facts.

¶4. (C) Kubis went on to say that he would no longer raise the ICRC access issue as one of his standard points with the GOTX. Recent feedback from the ICRC is that the latter "at least at the operating, if not political level" itself does not view strong public representation to be currently desirable. In particular, Geneva was reportedly ruffled when its request for "toned-down" language in the latest UNGA resolution was disregarded by the EU co-sponsors last November.

¶5. (C) Kubis said he had raised the case of Maral Yklimova, held under house arrest as a result of her father,s conviction in abstentia of coup plotting, with FM Meredov. Meredov agreed to report to the president, but stuck to the standard GOTX line that because she must have known what her father had been up to, she could not be permitted to leave Turkmenistan and join her family in Sweden.

¶6. (U) Finally, Kubis noted that the EU now sees it must pay added attention to education programs in Turkmenistan. The regime,s ongoing damage to its education system and future national competitiveness is worsening and has already spawned a yawning gap between Turkmenistan and even the other four former Soviet Central Asian republics. He hopes to follow up

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on this topic during future visits.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The official GOTX press release after the Niyazov-Kubis exchange bears out that Kubis,s readiness to discuss, in very general terms, EU interest in Turkmenistan,s energy-sector events had an acknowledged impact. That said, Kubis afterwards reiterated to us that he not only does not now have, but cannot readily foresee having, a solid EU mandate with regard to given policies vis--vis Turkmenistan energy questions. Ambivalent attitudes on the subject are liable to divide not only the EU,s membership, but its corporate and business interests, he pointed out.  
JACOBSON